United Nations S/PV.8173

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8173rd meeting

Wednesday, 31 January 2018, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Melki
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507)

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18-02656 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Kazakhstan.

During our presidency, Kazakhstan arranged its programme of work to address the ongoing and new emerging threats of the twenty-first century. We built upon Secretary-General Guterres' new agenda for peace, in synergy with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and today's realities.

As this has been the first time that Central Asia was represented on the Security Council in the history of the United Nations, we strove to balance the Council's global agenda with priorities in the region. Through multilateralism and a comprehensive approach for conflict prevention, we have alerted the Council to some impending challenges. Based on openness, neutrality and inclusivity, we have aspired to give the Council new dynamism with visions and forward momentum that eventually could become lasting legacies.

In addition to political diplomacy and mediation, a three-fold multidimensional strategy was put forward by Kazakhstan to promote and strengthen a security and development link, a regional approach to tackling transnational threats faced by countries in conflict, and streamlining the effectiveness of the Organization's system in delivering as one United Nations. Implemented in Central Asia, it can serve as a model for other regions, as well.

Kazakhstan has always endeavoured to enhance the unity and collective ownership of the Council. Our term began with a solemn flag raising ceremony that we introduced for the first time to pay tribute to newly-elected members and symbolize the trust placed in them by Member States. It is important that we agreed to make that innovation an annual practice at the beginning of every new term of the Council. We have also worked on behalf of all Member States, with a majority of 20 public meetings and only 10 consultations. In addition to three signature events, we have adopted two resolutions and four presidential statements, and issued 12 press statements. In many cases, their adoption and issuance, together with authorized media events, were critical to project the Council's support and unity, which was much needed, for those struggling in conflict zones to implement peace agreements. They also helped to enhance transparency, agree upon outcomes and define a road map for the future. I shall now briefly describe our signature events.

At the high-level thematic briefing on 18 January (see S/PV.8160), the most pressing global problem concerning the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was afforded a new perspective, as was the use of confidence-building measures. Presided over by President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, the discussions, which were attended by an unprecedented audience, gave momentum to a new paradigm for averting deliberate or accidental outbreaks of war, and conveyed my country's honour and respect for the United Nations. As has been stated by my Head of State, it is crucial to enjoy political will and build confidence among leaders to achieve a stable and secure world. Kazakhstan will continue its efforts to build trust among nations during its term on the Council. The same day, the Council adopted a milestone presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/1) as a blueprint for regional preventive diplomacy, which aims at achieving a world free of violent conflicts by the United Nations centenary in 2045.

The ministerial debate of 19 January, on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development (see S/PV.8162), was presided over by His Excellency Mr. Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, and included the participation of several visiting Ministers. Council members and 16 other delegations focused on investments in connectivity, trade and infrastructure so as to strengthen the security of the region. Kazakhstan's vision for the link connecting security and development could be realized through the integration of Afghanistan into the region with all its human capital and promise. Presidential statement S/PRST/2018/2, which was adopted before the debate, calls for enhanced regional, interregional and international cooperation to promote long-term peace, stability and sustainable development, as well as to combat terrorism, violence and drug trafficking.

One of the highlights of our presidency was the Security Council mission to Afghanistan from 12 to 15 January, which aimed at gaining first-hand information concerning threats facing the country and

its potential. That visit was the first made since 2010, and provided a unique opportunity to meet President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and a total of 120 representatives of the Afghan Government, the business sector, civil society, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the NATO Resolute Support Mission. The Council was able to demonstrate its support for the country and its commitment to peace and reconciliation. It also reinforced the importance of holding parliamentary and presidential elections in 2018 and 2019, respectively. The premise of our approach concerning the linkage connecting security, development, a regional approach and an effective United Nations has been fully recognized by the Afghan leadership.

On 29 January, at the initiative of Nikki Haley, Council members visited Washington, D.C., to meet with the United States leadership and exchange views with President Trump on the Council's agenda, including counter-terrorism.

The significance of regional preventive diplomacy was prominently brought to the fore at the briefing provided by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Natalia Gherman, Head of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mohammed ibn Chambas, Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). It was the first time in three years that a Security Council press statement (SC/13179) was issued concerning UNRCCA in support for the Centre, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in December 2017.

Meetings on various United Nations peacekeeping operations reviewed the work of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Mission in Colombia, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, UNOWAS, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, and analysed the readiness of their operations, while considering needed restructuring to address the political, security, humanitarian, human rights and development dimensions.

We take note that regional organizations and forums — such as the African Union, the European Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Group of Five for the Sahel — are crucial to reaching early and long-lasting solutions to conflicts in Africa. Intense deliberations concerning the Middle East made it clear that political will, confidence-building and trust are indispensable to bring all parties to the conflict to the negotiating table to bring about peace.

Dialogues with New York-based civil society representatives as our partners proved helpful. Inviting women activists gave on-the-ground insights and strengthened the women/youth and peace and security agenda as a prerequisite for stability and progress.

Although it does not fall under the programme of work of the Council, the landmark high-level special event surrounding the presentation by our Foreign Minister of a draft code of conduct towards achieving a world free of terrorism, which was held on 18 January and included more than 100 participants, was nevertheless very relevant to its work. The document will be further elaborated to serve as a platform to bring Member States together to honour their commitments to the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and other instruments.

We now close with this formal wrap-up session as a tool to assess the Council's response and relevance to address issues and improve its working methods. No endeavour is accomplished alone.

Unity is important. Our presidency was marked by a convergence of ideas, a spirit of compromise and readiness to seek common ground. As today's meeting is the last official one of our presidency, on behalf of my Government and my delegation, I express our warmest appreciation to all Council members and States Members of the United Nations for their whole-hearted solidarity with us. I also thank the Council's secretariat, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Safety and Security for their ongoing expert guidance at every stage.

In addition, we thank all branches of the Secretariat, and in particular the team of excellent interpreters for standing shoulder to shoulder with us. Alhough our presidency is ending, it only heightens our

resolve to move forward with greater commitment and determination. It is with great pleasure that I now hand over the stewardship of the Council to Kuwait. I wish the Kuwait delegation every success next month, and I assure it of our full support.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those other members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, and your team on the successful completion of your presidency. This month we welcomed the six newly elected members of the Security Council, and the important initiative that you took to organize a flag installation ceremony for the first time is very much welcomed and appreciated. We hope the ceremony will be maintained as a tradition in the years to come.

Substantively speaking, January has indeed been a very busy month and a great deal has been accomplished. The effort you, Sir, made in bringing the issue of Afghanistan and the Central Asia region to the fore is commendable. We also welcome the adoption of the press statement on the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (SC/13179) for the first time in some time. The visit to Kabul afforded Council members an opportunity to have a better appreciation of the situation in Afghanistan. The high-level briefing on non-proliferation (see S/PV.8160) also allowed us to have an exchange of views on practical confidence-building measures to de-escalate growing tensions and preserve the international non-proliferation regime.

Today I speak on behalf of three African members of the Council, and I would like to highlight the discussion we had over the past month, in particular with regard to issues of peace and security in Africa.

On 9 January the Security Council discussed the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see S/PV.8153). One year after the signing of the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016, the deep divisions that remain on its implementation and the tense political atmosphere that prevails in the country are a source of concern. The deteriorating security and humanitarian situation is also worrisome. There was broad consensus among Council members on the importance of accelerating the full implementation of the 31 December agreement, which remains the only viable framework for resolving the current political impasse and for doing everything possible to ensure that the elections scheduled for 23 December take place in a free, fair, peaceful and credible manner.

The critical importance of enhanced coordination among the United Nations, the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and other partners in supporting the implementation of the 31 December agreement and the electoral process was underscored. That and other relevant points are covered in the press statement issued by the Council on 16 in January (SC/13163), which sent a clear message to the Congolese parties to reject violence and address their differences peacefully. Resolving problems of violence in eastern and central Democratic Republic of the Congo, ensuring the rule of law and accountability were identified as priorities to facilitate the necessary conditions for the conduct of the elections.

On 10 January, the Council received a briefing on the situation in Darfur and the activities of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) (see S/PV.8155). It was noted that the security situation in Darfur continues to show marked progress and that the Government is consolidating State authority across Darfur. The weapons-collection programme launched by the Government is also said to have consolidated the prevailing relative peace and stability in Darfur. However, concern was expressed about the lack of progress in the peace process. With regard to UNAMID, the assessment report presented by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General on phase one of the reconfiguration of the mission (S/2018/12) was discussed. We welcome the presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/4) adopted this morning, which reflects the consensus of the Council on the situation in Darfur and the reconfiguration of UNAMID.

On 11 January, the Security Council received a briefing on the six-month report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) (see S/PV.8156). The briefing allowed the Council to reflect on the political, peace and security situation and the humanitarian situation in West Africa and the Sahel. The presidential statement adopted yesterday (S/PRST/2018/3) reflects the salient points raised during the Council's discussions and

its recognition of the role of UNOWAS in supporting efforts by national and local actors to sustain peace.

The Security Council discussed the situation in Libya on 17 January (see S/PV.8159). Council members reiterated their support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and his work to facilitate the implementation of the United Nations action plan. It was acknowledged that the road ahead would not be easy. The importance of further galvanizing the support of the Libyans themselves and of the international community to bring about a Libyan-led political solution, under the auspices of the United Nations, was very much underscored.

On 23 January the Council received a briefing on the situation in Mali and the activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (see S/PV.8163). It was an opportunity for the Council to welcome the renewed commitment of the Malian parties to the expeditious implementation of all of their remaining obligations under the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali by the end of March, through the adoption of a revised timetable. However, serious concern was expressed about persistent delays in the full implementation of key provisions of the Agreement. Council members underscored the urgent need to deliver tangible and visible peace dividends to the population in the north and other parts of Mali in order to preserve the relevance of the agreement and prevent the reversal of the gains achieved thus far. They expressed their intention to follow the situation closely and to respond with appropriate steps within the framework of resolution 2374 (2017), should the parties not implement the commitments made in accordance with the new timetable. We hope the press statement issued by the Council on 24 January (SC/13177) will send the right message to the parties in that regard.

On 24 January the members of the Security Council deliberated on the situation in Somalia (see S/PV.8165). While progress on the political, security and economic reforms was welcomed, the importance of making progress on key issues in 2018, including on the constitutional review, elections, fiscal federalism and power- and resource-sharing, was underscored. However, concern was raised about the ongoing instability in Somalia, and Council members urged all parties to resolve political differences through peaceful dialogue.

With regard to the conditions-based transition plan, the Council reaffirmed the importance of accelerating the implementation of the national security architecture while focusing on the gradual transfer of lead security responsibility from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to the Somali Government. In that regard, members underlined the importance of close consultation among the Federal Government, the federal member states, the African Union and the troop-contributing countries, the United Nations and international partners to ensure a coordinated approach to implementing conditions-based planning and financing. The joint efforts by the United Nations and the African Union to explore options for financing AMISOM was also noted.

Last but not least, the Council received a briefing on the situation in South Sudan (see S/PV.8166). The security situation in South Sudan remains fragile, and the dire humanitarian situation continues to be of serious concern. The signing of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access was welcomed, but its violation by the parties is dimming prospects for progress in ending the conflict. The members of the Council stressed that all violations must be investigated and that those responsible held accountable. In that regard, the role of the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism in verifying those violations was appreciated. Maintaining the unity of the Council, as expressed in its latest presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/4) in urging the parties to participate in the High-level Revitalization Forum of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and live up to the commitments they made, was underscored.

On the margins of the thirtieth African Union (AU) Summit, a series of meetings were held in Addis Ababa, including the meeting of the leaders of the United Nations, AU and IGAD as part of maintaining unity of purpose among the three organizations in the search for lasting peace, security and stability in South Sudan. The hope and expectation is that it would provide renewed impetus to the second phase of the High-level Revitalization Forum, which is scheduled to start early next month. We look forward to receiving a briefing from the Secretary-General on that and other related issues under the incoming presidency of the Kingdom of Kuwait, to which we wish the best of luck and success.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I offer many congratulations to Kazakhstan on its able leadership of the Council for the month of January. It has been a busy and productive month for the Security Council. Thanks to Kazakhstan's sustained efforts, the Security Council travelled on its first mission to Afghanistan in seven years, where it met with leaders of the Government of National Unity, officials of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, opposition parties and civil society representatives. Council members thanked the Afghan people for their continued resolve in the fight against terrorism, and noted international consensus on the need to strengthen security. They urged President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah to hold free, fair and transparent elections, as scheduled, and stressed the importance of maintaining unity for the sake of an inclusive and stable Afghanistan.

We welcome Kazakhstan's emphasis on promoting peace in Afghanistan, and we welcome the emphasis on the potential benefits of security and development partnerships between Afghanistan and Central Asia. We thank Kazakhstan for convening a ministerial debate on the partnership between Afghanistan and Central Asia. Afghanistan, as those present all know, is a top United States priority as well. That is why our National Security Advisor, H. R. McMaster, came to New York especially to brief the Council on Afghanistan and our South Asia strategy, which goes hand in hand with the United Nations efforts to end the conflict and help Afghans build a better future.

We were also very pleased to receive our biannual briefing on the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventative Diplomacy for Central Asia — the first by the mission's new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Natalia Gherman. Of particular note is the fact that the Council adopted a press statement (SC/13179) supporting her work, which is the first time we have come to a consensus on such a document in several years. We hope that it will open the door for future documents in support of the mission's important work.

However, obviously South and Central Asia were not the only focus to the Council's work. This month, Ambassador Haley urged Council members to support the South Sudan arms embargo and said that we as a Council must act on the position we took in our 14 December presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/25) to impose costs and consequences on those who undermine the peace process in South Sudan.

We also held important discussions on the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus Mission and its support for a comprehensive settlement to reunify Cyprus as a bizonal, bicommunal federation. We renewed the Mission's mandate this month and now we urge Cypriot leaders to take steps to rebuild trust, improve the public atmosphere and resume talks immediately.

Council members remain unified in support of the peace process in Colombia and the work of the United Nations Verification Mission, noting that the challenges posed by the reintegration of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia and the implementation of the historic Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace are significant, and success is not certain. The Council is also committed to the resumption of talks with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional and emphasizes the importance of a new ceasefire.

The Council also reaffirmed that the Libyan Political Agreement must remain the framework for the political process throughout the country's transition period and that there is no room for spoilers. It is long past time for all parties to put the interests of the Libyan people first and engage fully with the United Nations sponsored political process. In the meantime, we must also deepen our work with the Libyan authorities to ensure that all those responsible for human rights abuses against migrants, including the shocking practice of slavery, are held accountable.

As you, Mr. President, mentioned earlier this week, Ambassador Haley hosted the members of the Security Council in Washington, D.C., to view evidence of Iran's violations of its international obligations and its interference in conflicts around the region. She also hosted Security Council members at the United States Holocaust Museum for a discussion about atrocities in Syria. The trip underscored the need for the Council to take action on both fronts and pursue accountability.

I thank you again, Mr. President, for your able management of the Council this month. We are very much looking forward to the Kuwaiti presidency of the Council in February. We are confident that Kuwait will lead us effectively in our continuing efforts.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation joins in congratulating Kazakhstan on having fulfilled in earnest the responsibility of presiding over the Security Council during the month of January,

and for having done so at the highest level in its first time as a non-permanent member. We commend the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan and its team, as well as Ambassador Umarov.

We highlight President Nursultan Nazarbayev's participation in the very timely debate (see S/PV.8160) on the need to build confidence and prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the participation of Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov and his colleagues from Central Asia in the enriching debate on Afghanistan and the importance of regional cooperation for security and development (see S/PV.8162). In both cases, Kazakhstan made substantive contributions to international peace and security.

My delegation fully recognizes the need to take more constructive action in the prevention of conflicts at the national, regional and global levels in order to achieve sustainable peace. In that regard, we would like to share some reflections on the issues addressed by the Council in January, which has also been Peru's first month as a non-permanent member.

First, we have reaffirmed our conviction that the solution to the challenges facing the international community necessarily involves strengthening multilateralism, respecting and promoting international law, and observing the Charter of the United Nations, in particular Chapter VI on the peaceful settlement of disputes. We believe that today's world requires a multidimensional and comprehensive approach, which is the basis of sustainable peace. Sustaining peace also requires building inclusive and accountable national institutions aimed at achieving sustainable development and cooperation, as well as the active participation of women and young people. In that regard, we welcome the adoption of the presidential statement on prevention (S/PRST/2018/1), presented by the Kazakhstan delegation.

At the same time, we are of the view that it is appropriate to continue strengthening the ways in which the Council identifies, evaluates and responds to the emergence of new risks and threats. The Council must bear in mind the serious impacts of such phenomena as poverty, inequality or climate change on security, especially given that the United Nations system has the capacity to take action to such ends through a more coordinated and coherent approach of its three pillars.

Secondly, we welcome the broad consensus in the Council on many principles, perspectives and objectives, and we emphasize the need to maintain its unity. Without prejudice to the interests and differences that normally exist among its members, we believe that the unity of the Council leads to the firm commitments and concrete actions required to promote international peace and security. One example of that is the Council's unity in its support for the peace process in Colombia. We highlight, among the agenda items that we have considered this month, the efforts of that country to achieve sustainable peace with the support of the international community. We also note the unity of the Council in support of the peace process in Afghanistan. We thank the presidency and the Secretariat for the successful organization of the mission to that country, and thank the Afghan authorities for their favourable response. My country has strongly condemned the recent terrorist attacks and expressed its solidarity with the Afghan people and Government. We hope that those responsible will be punished.

This month, we have also recognized the important work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia in the fight against complex threats, such as terrorism and organized crime.

We also agree on the fundamental objective of achieving the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. We are cooperating in the follow-up of various processes included in the January agenda, inter alia, those of Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Darfur. We must nevertheless say that, in many cases, there is much more that can and should be done. We are particularly concerned, among the issues considered this month, by the difficulties in reaching a commitment regarding the non-impunity of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the lack of dialogue on the question of Palestine.

Thirdly, I would like to briefly refer to the work of the two subsidiary bodies over which Peru was in charge in January. The Counter-Terrorism Committee began the discussion on the annual programme and drew up the itinerary of visits and meetings throughout 2018. We are seeking long-term collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, including in the framework of the June meeting of relevant national authorities. The Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) also initiated the process of considering the recommendations made by the Panel of

Experts following the issuing of a substantive report that will be discussed during the Kuwaiti presidency in February.

In conclusion, I reiterate our congratulations to you, Mr. President, and your team for your exemplary work this month and we welcome the Kuwaiti delegation, which will assume the presidency tomorrow.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): Let me start by joining other Security Council members in paying tribute to you and your team, Mr. President, for your excellent stewardship of the Council during the month of January. As the first country from Central Asia to preside over the Council, we commend the focus on regional approaches to conflict prevention that you have brought to our work. Stronger regional cooperation can not only help overcome common challenges, but also creates the conditions for mutually beneficial opportunities. Each country is better off if their neighbours also prosper. That point was clearly demonstrated during the open debate on 19 January, when we discussed regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model for linking security and development. The presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) adopted following that debate is an important legacy of your presidency. I would also add my deep appreciation for our joint trip to Kabul and for the way you and your team managed that visit.

Regarding regional approaches, for our part, we were pleased to collaborate with Côte d'Ivoire, with constructive engagement from all Council members, on the presidential statement on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), which was adopted yesterday (S/PRST/2018/3). A regional approach to conflict prevention, early warning and response mechanisms have proven increasingly relevant as challenges related to climate change, trafficking and terrorism do not respect borders. UNOWAS is a model for other regions.

Sweden has long been a champion of disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The briefing on non-proliferation and, in particular, the important role of confidence building measures, was very welcome and timely. The Council has an important role to play in advancing these issues, as well as standing united to ensure that those who violate international norms are held to account. The Council needs to move forward in this effort.

In the area of non-proliferation, Sweden, together with Poland, requested an update from the Secretariat under other business following the 9 January intra-Korean talks, the first in two years. The Council members welcomed the developments, reiterated its call for full implementation of sanctions against North Korea and echoed the Secretary-General's call for denuclearization. The meeting was important, as it also showed the Council's commitment to and support for a peaceful solution to the tense situation on the Korean peninsula.

Turning to the situation in Syria, we are alarmed by what we heard only yesterday (see S/PV.8171) — the continued severity of the devastating humanitarian situation in Syria, the unacceptable levels of violence, and that urgent humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance, is required by more than 13 million people. As penholders, together with Kuwait, we are resolved to do what we can to support the United Nations and the humanitarian actors on the ground to help the millions in desperate need. During his briefing to the Council on 22 January, Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock outlined five actions needed for sustained and improved humanitarian assistance, particularly to besieged and hard-to-reach areas. These are concrete, tangible and realistic, and we strongly support them. It is imperative that the Council stand united behind the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in that regard.

Let me say a few words regarding working methods. We applaud your efforts, Sir, to ensure that the Council was able communicate clear messages after most closed consultations during the month. That not only increases transparency, but also helps the Council to summarize the most salient points of discussions and to think about how to best address the issues further. We look forward to working with Kuwait on continuing efforts to make the work of the Council more results-oriented, transparent and inclusive. The open debate next week on working methods is welcome in that connection. Many of the tools needed to make the Council more effective are already there; however, they must be used appropriately. That includes ensuring that meetings are tailored in terms of format and focus to ensure the best chance of a meaningful outcome from the Council's deliberations.

Finally, Mr. President, experience over the past year shows that non-traditional briefers from civil society, notably women, have often animated our discussions

by adding perspectives that we would otherwise not necessarily think about. We appreciate the fact that a woman civil society organization briefer was added to the United Nations Support Mission in Libya meeting on 17 January (see S/PV.8159). Ensuring women's full participation in sustaining peace is a Swedish priority. In Libya, it is essential that women be able to participate at every step in the implementation of the action plan. We strongly believe that the Council will find that our efforts are generally more effective if we allow that to happen across the board.

Mr. Melki (France) (*spoke in French*): As a very dense month comes to a close, I wish to commend the dedication, determination and effectiveness that you have shown, Mr. President. The work that has been accomplished over the course of the month is a testament to the commitment of Kazakhstan to the role of the Security Council and, more broadly, to the United Nations system and multilateralism. The track record is particularly positive in the domains of disarmament and non-proliferation, the maintenance of peace and regional cooperation in Central Asia, naturally, but also in West Africa, as evidenced by the meeting on 11 January (see S/PV.8156) and the adoption of the presidential statement on 30 January (S/PRST/2018/3).

Instead of delving into a programme too vast to be described in detail in this statement, I will limit myself to speaking about four priority elements for France.

First of all, January was an important month for addressing the African dossier in the Security Council. We held an important meeting on the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 9 January (see S/PV.8153). As the country enters an electoral year that will be vital to its future and the stability of the entire region, it will occupy the attention of the Council until 23 December. It has been important for the Council to express its expectations since the beginning of the year. The adoption of the press statement of 18 January (S/PRST/2018/1), for which I thank the Kazakh presidency, was an opportunity to show that attention and to recall the principles championed by the Security Council — the full implementation of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of measures to ease tensions, the respect for the electoral timetable and the participation of all in the electoral process in an environment of peace and of respect for fundamental rights.

On the humanitarian front, the statement was an opportunity for the Council to appeal to the partners of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to increase their financial aid to the country and to help it overcome the current humanitarian crisis, which is dire.

On a separate African topic, the meeting on the situation in Mali of 23 January (see S/PV.8163), allowed us to send a strong and unanimous message to the parties in Mali on the impatience of the Council with regard to the full implementation of the peace agreement. In that regard, the press statement that was issued on 24 January (see SC/13177), welcomes the renewed commitment of Malian parties to implement their respective obligations by the end of March, while indicating that if they do not, the new stages will be reviewed in the framework of the sanctions regime.

On the Malian peace process, without which there can be no peace in the Sahel, we must urgently make progress. France thanks Kazakhstan for having given the Council the opportunity to reaffirm that message.

Finally, we welcome the unanimous adoption yesterday of resolution 2399 (2018), renewing the sanctions regime on the Central African Republic until 31 January 2019. After the adoption of resolution 2387 (2017) on 5 November, which renewed the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, resolution 2399 (2018) is a new indication of the Council's attention to the situation in the Central African Republic.

The sanctions that we have just extended are not useful in and of themselves, but rather as a means to contribute to the stabilization of and the return of lasting peace to the Central African Republic. Armed groups indeed continue to have a presence on a great majority of the territory and continue to receive supplies, thanks to the illicit flow of arms and munitions from neighbouring countries. Maintaining the sanctions is therefore vital, but the mechanism will continue to be accompanied by necessary exemption procedures in order to allow the defence and security forces in the Central African Republic to be trained, equipped and armed. Resolution 2399 (2018) introduces two new elements that seem particularly important. It will allow us to sanction individuals who incite violence when their actions are likely to jeopardize the peace, stability and security of the Central African Republic, and to punish individuals who attack humanitarian workers.

The second priority as set out by the Kazakh presidency was Afghanistan and Central Asia, which

were the focus of the Council during January, as was stated earlier. The Council's visit to Kabul made it possible to reaffirm the international community's support for Afghanistan in a very fragile security context and take steps with respect to the elections and the peace process. The ministerial-level debate of 19 January (see S/PV.8162) on the links between development and security in Afghanistan and Central Asia was an opportunity to adopt the first Security Council presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) on the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia. Finally, the consultations held by the Council on 22 January on the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia led to the adoption, for the first time since January 2015, of a press statement reiterating the Council's support for the Centre (SC/13179).

The series of appalling attacks that recently struck Afghanistan make it clear that, regrettably, the country and the region as a whole require more than ever the attention of the Security Council.

Thirdly, another priority of the Kazakh presidency was reflected in the meeting held on 18 January at the initiative of and with the presence of the President of Kazakhstan (see S/PV.8160), which made it possible to address the issue of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This is an absolute priority for France as well. We are aware of the fact that the threats facing the non-proliferation regime are more significant than ever and that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the threat of their use by States or terrorist groups are proven dangers.

In North Korea and Syria, non-proliferation norms, which lie at the very heart of our collective security, are being regularly and often blatantly flouted. The rapid development of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic programmes remains for us a grave source of concern. The same is true of the ongoing use of chemical weapons in Syria.

This leads me to my last point: the crises in North Africa and the Middle East. We participated in an important meeting on Libya (see S/PV.8159) and in the quarterly open debate on the Middle East (see S/PV.8167). We had a number of opportunities to address the situation in Syria, especially the humanitarian aspect thereof. We also met to discuss various aspects of the humanitarian situation on 9 January, allowing us to touch on the situation in Raqqa, where mines and unexploded ordnance have killed more than 200 people since last October. It was also an opportunity for most of us to more strongly underscore the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Syria, in particular in eastern Ghouta and Idlib.

A second meeting on various items was held on 22 January to enable Mark Lowcock to brief the Security Council on his first visit to Syria and to make priority recommendations. Jeffrey Feltman briefed us on the most recent developments in northern Syria, and we took that opportunity to reiterate our grave concerns about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria. Two of those concerns were pre-eminent in our discussions: the situation of the population in eastern Ghouta, besieged by the Syrian regime, which is deliberately and systematically blocking humanitarian convoys and continues to refuse to authorize hundreds of urgent medical evacuations; and the resumption of attacks on civilians and medical infrastructure. Bombings have killed dozens of civilians in the "de-escalation zones", including in Idlib, where they also led to mass displacements.

Finally, we met yesterday for the monthly briefing (see S/PV.8171) and humanitarian consultations on Syria. The near-consensual views on the urgent humanitarian situation expressed on those occasions makes it vital that the Council issue a strong pronouncement. This would help to underscore the Council's concern with regard to the exacerbation of the situation of besieged civilians in eastern Ghouta and the failure to carry out urgently needed medical evacuations, the intensified bombings in the Idlib region, and the repeated attacks on hospitals and health-care workers.

The issues I have just touched on reflect the diversity and importance of our exchanges of views in the past month. Mr. President, I wish to thank you once again.

Ms. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): Let me first thank Kazakhstan for a very successful presidency.

January 2018 has been our first month on the Security Council, as part of our split term with Italy. I welcome this opportunity to reflect on what we, as a Council, have accomplished and also where we have made too little progress, or none at all.

Let me consider three issues in this regard: concerning Afghanistan, the prevention of conflict by

addressing root causes; peacekeeping operations that are fit for purpose; and accountability and justice.

On the issue of Afghanistan and prevention, Afghanistan and the Central Asian region have been at the heart of your programme, Mr. President, and the need for the Council's continued support of Afghanistan is evident. Just this past week, the Council issued three statements on the terrorist attacks there (SC/13172, SC/13180 and SC/13185). More than 100 people, mostly civilians, lost their lives. Those heinous attacks only strengthen our resolve to stand with the Afghan people.

Only an inclusive peace and reconciliation process — one that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned — can guarantee true stability in Afghanistan, and it is paramount that all countries in the region take up their responsibility by actively contributing to that goal.

In this context, the high-level debate held on January 19 (see S/PV.8162) provided a valuable opportunity for discussion, as did the valuable visit of the Council to Afghanistan. Members of the Council emphasized the need for inclusive regional development as an important factor in preventing conflict and sustaining peace in Afghanistan.

Conflict prevention and attention to root causes were also addressed in the work of the Council. The presidential statement on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel that the Council adopted just yesterday (S/PRST/2018/3) refers to the role of women in prevention and recognizes the adverse effects of climate change and drought on the stability of West Africa and the Sahel.

On peacekeeping, last December 15 United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) peacekeepers were killed in North Kivu. Last Saturday, another peacekeeper was killed in South Kivu province. Violence against United Nations peacekeepers is unacceptable and needs to stop. The people who are supposed to protect others are being themselves mercilessly targeted and killed. On 22 January, Lieutenant-General Cruz published a report that had been requested by the Secretary-General. In the report, Mr. Cruz presents clear recommendations on how to change the way in which the United Nations operates in high-risk peacekeeping operations. Previous reports have included similar recommendations. Missions must be better prepared and more proactive in implementing their mandate and protecting civilians. MONUSCO is one of the missions that operates in an environment where there is barely any peace to keep and where the notion of the primacy of a viable political process is almost absent.

In our discussions this month on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, we addressed similar serious challenges. The credibility of the Council depends partly on our ability to design and guide effective peacekeeping operations. That is why the Kingdom of the Netherlands is planning to organize an open debate on peacekeeping in March.

On accountability and justice, this month we heard reports of the renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria resulting in the killing of more than 20 civilians in eastern Ghouta. In addition, the indiscriminate bombardment of civilian-populated areas in Syria continues, as does the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, through the blocking of desperately needed humanitarian aid, including food aid. What has become of the hard-won gains in international humanitarian law in the last century? The lack of compliance with the Geneva Conventions by parties to the Syrian conflict erode not only the very norms enshrined in these Conventions, but also the rules-based international order. We cannot let that happen.

In 2015, the Council took decisive and credible action to uphold accountability when it established the United Nations Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (see S/PV.7501). It had a strong mandate to investigate and identify perpetrators independently from the politics in the Council. It established the use of chemical weapons in Syria by both the Syrian authorities and Da'esh. We have now considered a draft resolution to establish a new mechanism, as presented by the Russian Federation last week. The fundamental characteristics of any accountability mechanism are the principles of impartiality and independence. They were still missing in the proposal that was presented. A new mechanism should at least have the mandate to conduct research and identify perpetrators independently of the Council. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is ready to continue to work for justice and accountability for Syria and elsewhere in the world. In that regard, we welcomed the General Assembly's establishment of an accountability mechanism for the most serious crimes committed in Syria, the International, Impartial and

Independent Mechanism to assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 (General Assembly resolution 71/248). Ultimately, the most appropriate path to accountability and justice would be a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

In conclusion, we thank the Kazakh presidency for its conduct of the Council's business during the month of January and appreciate its efforts to agree on press elements after most consultations as well as to encourage Council members to speak in the Chamber where possible. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish the delegation of Kuwait all the best for its presidency in February. We look forward to working with them.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Security Council's agenda for the past month has been especially full. We would like to thank you personally, Mr. President, and your entire team for your very professional and effective execution of your functions in the presidency. We appreciate the relevance of Kazakhstan's initiatives, which reflect the Council's central role in seeking and developing effective solutions to very difficult problems related to the maintenance of international peace and security.

That applies particularly to the Security Council's meeting on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (see S/PV.8160). We believe firmly that the way to put an end to the risks and threats in this area is by observing the fundamental principles of international law and ensuring equal and indivisible security conditions for every country. The current state of affairs in the area of non-proliferation and disarmament urgently needs us to collaborate in the quest for ways to deal with its growing problems while at the same time maintaining cooperation mechanisms that have been proven to be effective and respecting the interests of all States.

We greatly appreciated the holding of a ministerial-level debate on Afghanistan and Central Asia (see S/PV.8162). Kazakhstan's particular focus on the issue of Afghanistan has been backed up by Astana's responsible attitude to the quest for answers to the threats to the Central Asian region emanating from Afghanistan. The dangerous situation there, including the increasing risk of Afghanistan's northern provinces becoming a bridgehead for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, requires an integrated approach both from the regional Powers and the international community as a whole. We assume that within the framework of initiatives designed to promote Central Asian-Afghanistan cooperation, primary consideration will be given to the positive experience of the Moscow format and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Afghanistan Contact Group. Mutually beneficial cooperation is what is needed in Eurasia today, and external actors should promote that rather than attempting to drag the countries of the region into a zero-sum game or present them with a false choice between North and South.

We welcomed the presidential statement on Afghanistan and Central Asia (S/PRST/2018/2), aimed at strengthening peace and stability in the region. It is important that we succeeded in reaching a mutual understanding on conflict prevention in the presidential statement. However, it was also clear that discussion of this pressing issue should continue in the wider format of the General Assembly and its specialized committees. We commend the Council's very well prepared mission to Kabul during Kazakhstan's presidency. After a gap of many years since the previous such visit, it once again demonstrated the Security Council's unity on the issue of the Afghan dossier and represented an important milestone in the context of resolving the country's situation. We were pleased with the consultations on the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, which we see as a comprehensive political tool for establishing dialogue, cooperation and a peaceful resolution of the issues among Central Asian states. It was gratifying that for the first time in three years the Council was able to agree on a press statement regarding the Centre's activities (SC/13179).

The quarterly debates on the Middle East have unfortunately confirmed the fact that the crisis trends in the region are still dominant. An episode of serious arrhythmia in the efforts to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict complicated the task of restarting a political dialogue. The situation in Yemen is rapidly deteriorating, while the state of affairs in Syria, Libya and Iraq remains difficult. We firmly believe that breakthroughs will be possible only through coordinated international cooperation and the establishment of a unified agenda. We must strive to unite our efforts to combat terrorism and consolidate our approaches to settling serious

regional crises. Russia is ready to participate in that work with all interested partners. Attempts to promote national agendas while ignoring the views of other Member States, which we unfortunately witnessed at the beginning of the month, are counterproductive and only make the quest for lasting solutions to the issues harder.

In the past month, with regard to a settlement of the conflict in Syria, a ninth round of negotiations was held under the auspices of the United Nations. We are pleased that there has been no pause in the recent inter-Syrian talks. In Sochi, in the past few days, with the support of the United Nations, the partners in the Astana process and the leading regional states held the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, an unprecedentedly major event hosted by Russia. The Security Council has consistently emphasized that it is the Syrians themselves who must determine their country's future, and a wide representation of every stratum of Syrian society such as this is therefore simply crucial to enabling work to begin on such urgent issues as constitution-building. In that regard, our efforts dovetail fully with the logic of resolution 2254 (2015), and we hope that they will have an appropriate follow-up.

At Russia's initiative, the Council began discussing the creation of a new international investigative mechanism to replace the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, whose reputation is tainted. It will be important to ensure that any new entity works professionally and reliably to establish all the circumstances related to the use of poisonous substances, in strict conformity with Chemical Weapons Convention rules, in order to eventually ascertain the identity of the perpetrators of such acts.

During the discussion in January of issues in West Africa and the Sahel-Saharan region (see S/PV.8156), we concluded that the countries of the region are all dealing with similar challenges and threats that should be combated through a multifaceted approach. The United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel region is a mechanism whose potential for making progress on these issues has not been fully exploited.

The extension of the mandate of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus for another six months was an important step, since the mission will be particularly needed during the six-month pause in the direct talks on a settlement between the island's two communities. The slight reduction in the size of its military component should in no way affect its overall effectiveness.

In conclusion, we would like to once again thank our friends from Kazakhstan and wish every success to the delegation of Kuwait, to which the baton of the presidency passes in February.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates the fact that under the presidency of Kazakhstan, the Council has accomplished its work for the month of January. We congratulate Ambassador Umarov and his team on their outstanding performance.

With regard to the Council's work this month, I would like to reaffirm our positions on the following three issues.

The first issue concerns the situation in Afghanistan. Peace and stability in Afghanistan are in the interest of the long-term well-being of the Afghan people and impact their regional stability and security. The situation in Central Asia has been stable on the whole and the region has great potential for development. On 13 and 14 January, a Council delegation travelled to Afghanistan and visited Kabul. On 19 January, the Council held an open meeting at the ministerial-level on peace and security in Afghanistan and Central Asia (see S/PV.8162) and adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2018/2. All that has helped Council members understand the Afghan issue through first-hand experience, facilitated efforts by the international community to explore ways to solve the Afghan issues from a regional perspective, and promoted lasting peace and development in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The second issue is the situation in Middle East. In January, the Council held an open meeting on Libya (see S/PV.8159) and an open debate on the question of Palestine (see S/PV.8167). More than 50 countries and organizations stated their views on the situation between Palestine and Israel and the status of Jerusalem. That has enhanced the understanding of the parties concerned about the urgency of resolving the relevant issues and sent a strong message from the international community urging the early resumption of peace talks between Palestine and Israel.

The third issue is the situation in Africa. In January, the Council discussed the situations in West Africa, the Sahel region, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Somalia, Mali and the Democratic

Republic of the Congo and adopted relevant outcome documents. The Council has continued to focus its attention on agenda items on Africa and expresses its support to regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union's good offices, and has supported regional countries with a view to making progress in addressing challenges. That is conducive to achieving lasting peace and stability on the African continent at an early date.

In conclusion, I wish Kuwait all the best in assuming the presidency in the month of February. China will actively support its work.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): First of all, allow me to congratulate you personally, Mr. President, as well as your team, our colleagues from Kazakhstan, on your very successful presidency during the month of January. We express our gratitude and commend your efficient and professional conduct of the work of the Security Council. We particularly appreciate your transparency in dealing with the media, as demonstrated by your presentation, on many occasions, of communiqués to the press.

This month was busy, but it was also very productive, as the Council dealt with important issues for international peace and security. We held two high-level events dedicated to important topics, and the Council undertook a visit to Afghanistan, which was a way to gain a first-hand understanding of the country's needs and priorities and an opportunity to show solidarity with the people of Afghanistan.

Let me now concentrate on three topics that Poland considers important for our activities in the Council.

My first point relates to the role of preventive diplomacy, which was rightfully underlined during several meetings this month. On 18 January, the Council adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2018/1, on conflict prevention. For the first time since 2015, the Council also adopted a press statement (SC/13179) in which it commended the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, which can be seen as a positive development. I also believe that presidential statement S/PRST/2018/3, on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, which was adopted yesterday, will be a useful tool for maintaining stability in the region.

Secondly, let me mention briefly the issue that is at the forefront of Poland's activities in the Security Council, namely, the role of international law in maintaining peace and security. We see the need for further development of legal instruments in international relations and for the ability to enforce them. In that regard, the high-level briefing on non-proliferation and confidence-building measures, which was held two weeks ago (see S/PV.8160), was most timely and important.

Thirdly, let me also highlight the need for maintaining the Council's unity and ownership, which was demonstrated in yesterday's adoption of resolutions and presidential statements. We will need this level of unity during the upcoming months when discussing the most serious challenges to peace and security, but also humanitarian situations.

January was also a month of deadly terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and Mali. Such tragic events show us how much the Council's activities and unity are needed, and we have to deliver.

In conclusion, I would like once again to thank our colleagues from Kazakhstan and express our gratitude to them.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I wish Kuwait every success during its presidency of the Council next month.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinatinal State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to warmly congratulate and thank you, Mr. President, for your professional, effective and proactive work in guiding the Security Council's work this month. We commend your leadership, and that of your entire delegation, during your presidency.

The vision and perspectives brought by Kazakhstan have been instrumental in the preparation of the programme of work for this month, in which the Security Council placed primary and needed emphasis on the challenges facing Afghanistan and its relationship with the Central Asian region. Presidential statement S/PRST/2018/2, adopted on 19 January, and the debate held on the same day (see S/PV.8162), at which the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan was present, served to lay the groundwork for the Security Council's debate on the existing ties between Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development.

In that regard, I would like to emphasize that cooperation between the Central Asian States and Afghanistan is fundamental for the stabilization of that country, particularly with regard to the fight against transnational crime and terrorism. Proof that this issue is essential to the country and the region is the perpetration of four terrorist attacks in the past week, which resulted in the deaths of almost 200 people. We reiterate our gratitude for the bravery and sacrifice that Afghanistan's people, Government and security forces continue to make in the fight against terrorism on behalf of all of us.

In addition, the need for cooperation in the fight against transnational crime and terrorism was demonstrated during the consultations held on 22 January on the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia. During those consultations, we were once again able to stress the importance of intraregional cooperation and Central Asia's cooperation with Afghanistan. We also highlight the Council's adoption of a press release (SC/13179) in support of the work of the Regional Centre, which had not happened since 2015.

Another event that we would like to underscore is the Security Council's visit to Kabul, which allowed us to have a closer look on the ground of the political reality and security in Afghanistan. We highlight the work done by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in support of the political process in the country. In that regard, for us Security Council members who had the opportunity to travel to Afghanistan with you, Mr. President, the incidents that I described earlier — I am referring to the terrorist attacks perpetrated and suffered in Kabul in recent days — not only are news that one reads with sadness and pain but also become very close personal experiences. That is why we applaud your personal insistence, Mr. President, and that of your delegation that the trip should take place.

We would also like to highlight the emphasis that the presidency placed on the issue of non-proliferation with the holding of the high-level briefing on confidence-building measures (see S/PV.8160), at which the President of Kazakhstan was present. In that context, we highlight the decision of countries such as Kazakhstan to eliminate the possession of nuclear weapons from their defence doctrines and their national security policies. That is a clear example of how, with political will, leadership and resolve, it is possible to achieve that goal.

As a member of the first densely populated area declared free of nuclear weapons and of the first region to declare itself a zone of peace, Bolivia reiterates that it is ready to launch a call for that example to be replicated in other regions. We believe that the best prevention measure is the elimination of all nuclear weapons and other weapons of massive destruction.

In that regard, we highlight the presidential statement on preventive diplomacy (S/PRST/2018/1), adopted on 18 January, which reiterates the need for the Security Council to focus on the prevention of armed conflicts by making effective use of tools such as negotiation, mediation, conciliation, and recourse to regional organizations or arrangements, among others, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. It also highlights the importance of taking into account the participation of regional and subregional actors in mutual confidence-building measures.

We would also like to highlight the briefing on the peace process in Colombia (see S/PV.8154), which took place on 10 January. It is important to highlight the commitment of the Government of Colombia and of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) to implementing the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace. Although there are significant challenges in the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life, in the strengthening of security in the areas abandoned by the FARC and in specific measures to move forward with comprehensive rural reform, the willingness shown by the parties and by the people of Colombia demonstrate that the peace process is irreversible. With regard to the negotiation process with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional, we regret that it has been suspended. We hope that the talks can be resumed as soon as possible.

To conclude, we highlight the holding of the open debate on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (see S/PV.8167). We believe that the monthly holding of such a meeting and the focus of our efforts on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are fundamental to bringing us closer to resolving it. We reiterate that the only way to guarantee a just and lasting peace is through the two-State solution, whereby a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State can finally be established within the pre-1967 international borders, with East

Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

In addition to once again congratulating you, Mr. President, on the way in which Kazakhstan carried out the work of the presidency, we pledge all our efforts so that, likewise, the presidency of Kuwait has the same success.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, and all of your team on a successful presidency. From the first day, when you started what I hope will be a new Security Council tradition by organizing a flag ceremony to welcome the new members, you have managed the Security Council business in an inclusive, transparent and very effective manner.

I will focus my intervention on three of the most pressing threats to international peace and security that the Council has tackled in January — Afghanistan, South Sudan and Syria.

I would first like to welcome the leadership that Kazakhstan has demonstrated on Afghanistan. The Security Council visit that you, Mr. President, organized strengthened our collective understanding of the conflict and established many areas of consensus among Council members. However, as my Dutch colleague has already highlighted today, the terrible events of the past week, with multiple terrorist attacks claiming many innocent lives, remind us of the scale of the threat faced by the people of Afghanistan and the need for the Council to work together to promote security and stability.

As we all agreed, there can be no purely military solution to the conflict. Long-term peace and stability will be achieved only through a peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Regional cooperation is essential for that, and I would like to commend Kazakhstan again for convening the important ministerial discussion on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia (see S/PV.8162). Progress towards the holding of credible and inclusive parliamentary elections this year and presidential elections next year is another important step towards stability.

Looking ahead, the mandate renewal of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in March presents a valuable opportunity to streamline the Mission. That will allow us to concentrate on the most crucial areas to support the Government of Afghanistan's efforts to achieve a long-time peace.

This month we have also discussed the situation in South Sudan. We all were clear and united in our concern about the continued violence and the actions of all parties to the conflict. After making our expectations clear in last month's presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/25), we now need to make the consequences clear to violators of the cessation of hostilities and to those who undermine the High-Level Revitalization Forum. To prevent further violence, the effective monitoring and attribution of violations will be essential. Obstruction and criticism of the ceasefire and transitional security arrangements for monitoring must end immediately.

We reiterate our call today for an arms embargo. It would apply equally to all parties and would not single anyone out for blame. It would send a strong message to spoilers and strengthen those attempting to bring the South Sudanese parties to peace. It is in line with what the region has called for — clear consequences for violators.

Finally, let me turn to Syria. The sharp deterioration in the already dire humanitarian situation occurs as the Al-Assad regime continues to use aid as a weapon of war and denies humanitarian access to those most desperately in need. No progress has been made on accessing the 2.5 million people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. The request of the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for agreement to allow three or four United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoys each week across front lines to those areas has been ignored. Children in eastern Ghouta are dying as they wait for the regime's approval to be medically evacuated.

This month, the continued indiscriminate aerial bombardment of Idlib has caused countless civilian casualties, targeted hospitals and displaced 270,000 people within Idlib itself, stretching the already scarce resources beyond their limits. UNICEF has reported that, in the first 14 days of 2018, more than 30 children were killed by escalating violence in besieged eastern Ghouta.

The Council has agreed that we should put aside our differences over the political situation in order to tackle humanitarian issues. However, despite all the rhetoric, we have not seen any progress and, more important, nor have the people of eastern Ghouta. They

are still besieged, starving and cut off by the Syrian regime from any help. As the Security Council, we cannot allow that to continue for yet another month. The Syrian regime must allow the delivery of essential aid and medical evacuation for those who need it most. The Council must be able to express itself clearly on the matter and uphold its responsibilities.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express my deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, and to your team for your hard work this month and for the professional way in which you led the Security Council deliberations.

Together, we were able to adopt a number of resolutions, presidential statements and press statements, which reflected the unity of the Security Council towards the various issues under its consideration. You, Sir, were also keen to provide the press with information after informal consultations held in January.

In our view, the holding of today's meeting represents an occasion to review the Council's work during an unusually eventful month. In that regard, I would like to highlight some of the important achievements of your presidency and address additional points, as follows.

First, the important field visit of Council members to Afghanistan was the first since 2010. It demonstrated the Council's commitment to closely monitoring the latest developments in one of the most important conflicts on its agenda. We reaffirm the importance of such field visits, which provide an opportunity to follow developments on the ground in conflict zones, understand the real challenges faced by countries in question and realize the responsibilities of the Council to meet all needs and requirements so as to achieve international peace and security.

Secondly, the open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (S/PV.8167), proved that it is now high time to end the Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories so that the Palestinian people can exercise all their rights, including their right to establish a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and along the 4 June 1967 borders, as provided for in the resolutions of international legitimacy and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Thirdly, Kuwait is co-penholder with Sweden on the humanitarian situation in Syria. As such, we are prepared to take the lead in reaching a unified position in the Council to improve the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria; to expand the range of humanitarian assistance so that it can reach different parts of Syria, such as Eastern Ghouta, Idlib, and north of Aleppo; and to provide protection to civilians in the light of the increasing violence there.

Fourthly, with regard to presidential note S/2017/507, we have come together today to implement its most salient elements. As Chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, I take this opportunity to announce, in my capacity as President of the Council next month, that we will hold an open debate in the first week of February to hear statements and recommendations by United Nations States Members — not only Security Council members — on how to increase transparency and improve the performance of the Security Council. That will allow us to identify ways to improve our working methods during our presidency.

In conclusion, I thank all Council members that have offered their good wishes and support to Kuwait's presidency of the Council as of tomorrow. We look forward to cooperating with all Council members so that the Council can carry out its tasks, shoulder its responsibilities and implement its mandate for maintaining international peace and security. We will ensure that the presidency is transparent and cooperative in a constructive manner with all Member States.

The President: As this is the last scheduled meeting of the Security Council for the month of January, I would like to reiterate the sincere appreciation of the delegation of Kazakhstan to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives, their respective staffs and the secretariat of the Council, for all the support they have given to us. Indeed, it has been a busy month, and one in which we rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone, or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as all the conference service officers, interpreters and security staff.

As we end our presidency, I know that I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of Kuwait good luck in the month of February. As a token of our appreciation, we have distributed to each delegation photographs to commemorate our work together and limited-edition commemorative stamps.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.